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COMMUNICATION

THE HONOR SYSTEM

To the Editor of the School Review.

DEAR SIR :— Being a Virginian, I read with a great deal of pride Dr. Mackenzie's view of "the system long associated with the name of the University of Virginia," which I believe to be the true system of conducting examinations in schools and colleges ; at the end of the examination paper each student should be required to sign a pledge, certifying on his word of honor that he has neither given nor received assistance during the examination.

In the schools in which I have taught, there has been a diversity of opinion among the faculties, the opponents of the pledge system claiming that a student who would cheat during an examination, would without hesitancy sign his name to such a pledge ; and that it only made matters worse by requiring him to certify on his word of honor to a falsehood. This I do not believe to be true, as there is a certain sacredness about pledging one's honor which appeals to the majority of boys, and if the student has had the proper training in his preparatory school it is unreasonable to believe that by the time he reaches college the pledge will not be a guard against his receiving assistance.

We all, who have had the advantages of an education, have lived in three worlds, each with its different environments, with temptations and responsibilities growing greater and greater as we go from one to the other ; to live rightly in one we must have lived rightly in the other ; each is going to add to or take from that which is left from the other. To be an honest student in college one must have been an honest student in his preparatory work ; to be an honest man in the world one could not have been a thief at college.

I had an opportunity a few years ago to test the great advantages of the honor system, and the bad results of the prevailing system of not requiring the student to sign a pledge, but the instructor keeping a diligent watch over him during the examination. I have been associated with a school where the honor system was used throughout the work, the word "certified" being required on every paper handed in by the student, whether examination or general class work. There was a higher standard of honor in that school and a stricter sense of

individual responsibility during examinations than in any school of which I have knowledge.

A few years ago, I was teaching in a preparatory school to one of our leading colleges, and at the first intermediate examination brought up the question of the honor system, which has always been in vogue at the Virginia Military Institute, where I was educated. It was opposed by members of the faculty, their principal reason being the one which I have given. I, however, adopted the system in my own classes with great success. Being interested then in the question, and knowing that examinations were in progress at the college, I talked with a number of the students on the subject. I was absolutely amazed at the view some of the young men took of it. One of them, with apparent pride, showed me a set of octagonal pencils that had been handed down from class to class, he having paid ten dollars for them. On the sides of these pencils was, practically, the synopsis of physics, all of the principal formulae being neatly and systematically cut. These he would take into the examination hall, apparently to write with, and would use one after another, until he found the one that had on it what he wanted. I was also shown what was known as a "roll," on which a synopsis of Logic was written. On asking the question, if a pledge was not required, the reply was, "No, if it had been, we would not have cheated him," and on further questioning, I found that the idea of being dishonest was overshadowed by the idea that they were getting ahead of the professor.

That this condition should exist in one of our leading colleges is surely very deplorable, and I trust the day is not far off when all of our schools and colleges will adopt that system so well known at the University of Virginia, and which has proved so successful at Princeton and Cornell.

It should be so, and with the honor system it is so, that a student will be in as much fear of having his classmate see him "crib" as his instructor.

Dr. Arnold's theory of character building, as the first aim of education, should be at all times before the instructor, and the student should be made to realize that he is building the character house in which he is to live for the remainder of his life, and should see to it that the foundation is not built upon the sands of dishonor and deception.

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